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Canadian Autonomy

Its
Nature and Limits

By

J. Williamson, M.A.
(Oxon)

Address to
St. Andrew's Guild, Montreal
April 2, 1917

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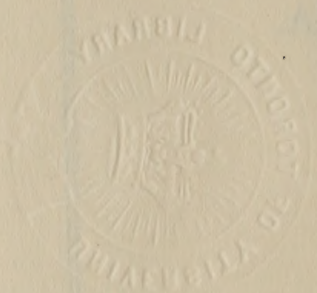

Canadian Autonomy.

Recent discussion of imperial questions has been marked by an absence of clear thinking and precision in the use of terms. Too often words and phrases have been made to do duty for ideas, with vagueness and confusion of thought as a result.

I

Nowhere has this been more noticeable than in the use of the term "autonomy". When Lord Haldane, e. g. speaks of the self-governing Dominions having "freedom to regulate their own affairs", what does he mean by "their own affairs"? Are all their affairs "their own"? Have they any affairs not exclusively "their own"? which they have in common with the other members of the empire. The Province of Quebec has interests exclusively its own and also interests common to the other Provinces of Canada. But does the right of its people to manage "their own affairs" imply also an exclusive right to manage those interests they share in common with their fellow citizens of the Dominion? If so, how can the Province of Quebec be regarded as in any sense a part of the Dominion? And if the right of the people of Canada to manage "their own affairs" implies also the exclusive right to determine those they have in common with the rest of the empire, how can they be said in any sense to form a part of the empire? The fact of membership in the British Empire is itself the evidence of the existence of interests which are special to no one part but common to all, and which, therefore, are the special concern of no one part in particular but of all in common.

Again, when Mr. Asquith speaks of the combination of complete local autonomy with "spontaneous and unforced cooperation for common interests and purposes," is such cooperation

to be depended on, on all occasions? If so, how is it "spontaneous and unforced"? Or is it purely voluntary and to be depended on only as the caprice of the moment may decide? Then such cooperation in realty is no cooperation. It is a negligible quantity, and must therefore be ignored in any scheme of effective imperial defence. In a time of crisis if the Empire is to depend merely upon the voluntary cooperation of its various parts; if there is to be no power in the last resort, as in every fully organised state, able, if necessary, to compel an unwilling member to fulfil its duty, the British Empire can no longer be regarded as a single state. It is dissolved among its parts and has ceased to be. When, therefore, Mr. Asquith further asserts of the United Kingdom and the self-governing Dominions, "we each of us are and intend to be, masters in our own house", the assertion is a truism if it means that in the management of those of their own affairs which are purely local, the self-governing Dominions are free. If it means more, how much more is implied? The whole metaphor is misleading. "Household" does not adequately express the true relation between the self-governing Dominions and the United Kingdom to each other and the Empire as a whole. The British Empire is more than a collection of "households"; or else the "households" are in fact, if not in name, sovereign states. What of those imperial affairs in which Canadians have a direct though not an exclusively local interest in common with the rest of the Empire? It is all very well to say: "The best way of maintaining the British Empire is to allow every community to administer its own affairs in its own Parliament." It is the only principle consistent with freedom. Canada wants no interference from the United Kingdom, nor the United Kingdom from Canada, in the management of affairs specifically its own. But the practical question is, how far does this apply? Where is the line that divides imperial and local interests, and who shall determine it? What of those interests common to Canada and the rest of the Empire? It has not yet been claimed for Canada in set terms by any responsible statesman that "its own affairs," is meant to cover the complete circle of its interests, both those specifically its own and those it shares in common with others. To do so

would be to assert that each part of the Empire is practically independent. Yet the term "autonomy" is sometimes used without a clear perception of what it implies; and a course of action has more than once been suggested under cover of Canadian autonomy which could lead only to the disruption of the Empire. True autonomy for Canada as an integral part of the British Empire is, however, something different.

The principle of autonomy or self-government in local affairs for a Province or a State as a member of a larger political system is embodied in the constitutions of the German Empire and Switzerland. Though its nature and limits are nowhere clearly defined it forms, as has been said, the basic principle in the government of the British Empire, as determining the relations between the United Kingdom and the various self-governing Dominions, and the Provinces or States in each of those Dominions with reference to such Dominion as a whole. The best expression of the principle, however, is found in the constitution of the United States, a constitution which has endured practically unchanged for upwards of a century and a quarter, withstood the strain of four years of civil war, and enabled the original thirteen Colonies with a population of about four millions to expand across the continent into the 48 States which now form the union, with a population of over one hundred millions. The principle is simple. The interests that all have in common are referred to the care of a central government directly representative of all the states. The interests that are purely or mainly local are managed by each state for itself.

The same principle is seen in the Canadian constitution, in the relation between the various Provinces and the Dominion Those general interests common to all the Provinces, but particular to none, are entrusted to the central government of the Dominion, which represents the whole people. The interests that are specifically local are handed over to a local government.

On a larger scale it is essentially the same with the British Empire as a whole in regard to the relations between the United Kingdom and the various self-governing Dominions. "Canada at no price can surrender her autonomy" it is claimed

with tiresome iteration. No more can Australia, or even the United Kingdom. There are many interests peculiar to each self-governing group within the Empire, which the members of that group must be free to manage as they please. There are Canadian interests quite distinct from those of the United Kingdom or Australia, which Canadians must determine without outside interference. But there are also some vital interests common to the Empire and not special to any part of it. For the British Empire is more than the mere sum of its parts. It is a living whole through which throb the pulses of a common life.

It was unfortunate that in the Act of Confederation no precise definition was given of the principle of autonomy and no definite limitation of its application. The relations of the various Provinces to the Dominion were defined, but not that of the Dominion itself to the United Kingdom or the Empire. It was another instance of the seemingly incurable habit of mind of British statesmen, to look only at the best means of meeting the difficulty of the moment without regard to the future. Instead of proceeding on a carefully thought out comprehensive plan for the whole empire to be gradually completed as the occasion arose, the future was left to take care of itself. And while extensive rights of self-government were conferred upon Canada, and the principle of autonomy for the colonies which were ready for it took the place of government from Downing Street, the opportunity was missed of completing the scheme, by defining once for all the place of the Dominions in the imperial system and the precise nature and limits of their powers of self-government, and by laying down some definite principles by which their share of the burden of imperial defence should be determined.

II.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier in particular is obsessed with the idea of Canadian autonomy. "Canada would at no price accept anything depriving it of its legislative autonomy," is the contant burden of his speeches on imperial affairs. But if this is more than a flourish of rhetoric, what precisely does it mean? That Canada has the right to the management of her own local

affairs, and those which do not equally affect other members of the Empire, no one denies. On the other hand the term "legislative autonomy" may be stretched to include demands which practically amount to a claim of independence. Which is it to be? The time has come for clear thinking and plain speaking on the subject. Is Canada to be regarded as an integral portion of the British Empire with all the rights and privileges, and also the duties and responsibilities involved in such a position, or is it not? The Canadian people have a right to know whither they are being led. Sir Wilfrid Laurier has nowhere put himself on record clearly and definitely in words. But his public policy and acts as Prime Minister during sixteen eventful years supply an answer of a kind. During those years Sir Wilfrid tried to give a new interpretation to the principle of "legislative autonomy" and to stretch its application beyond what had hitherto been attempted.

To the other states of the American Union it would appear a startling application of the principle of autonomy if the State of New York were to claim the right of making treaties with foreign nations irrespective of the views or interests of the other States. It was such a claim on the part of the southern states—to treat the question of slavery as a purely economic interest specially their own, and the consequent assertion of their right to withdraw from the union when it was denied—that led to the Civil War and the final settlement of the question whether any state were in the last resort independent of the union.

On no known definition of autonomy as the principle of self-government in local affairs, can the general right of treaty making with foreign nations be regarded as included in its scope. Yet that is a right, so far at least as purely commercial treaties are concerned, which has been claimed for Canada by Sir Wilfrid Laurier under cover of "legislative autonomy." At the Imperial Conference of 1911 he claimed for the Dominion the right to make its own commercial treaties with foreign nations. So far there had been no precise limitation of the power of the Dominion in this direction, nor had it been granted any special power so to legislate. Sir Wilfrid did not claim the right to share in making other treaties by the im-

perial government with foreign nations. In all these treaties Canada has vital interests as a member of the empire. Its prosperity, its safety, its very existence are affected by such treaties, far more than by any purely commercial treaties, even were such treaties possible. Why then did not Sir Wilfrid claim a share in those as well? To have a voice in the making of treaties with foreign nations is for the citizens of Canada one of their highest rights; and until this is recognised Canadians are in a position of inferiority to their fellow citizens in the United Kingdom and deprived of the full rights of imperial citizenship. Why then did Sir Wilfrid stop short of the claim to a share in the full treaty making power? He himself has supplied the answer. Unfortunately for him such a claim carried with it the admission of a corresponding duty. The possession of the full rights of imperial citizenship implied the duty of sharing in the responsibility thus involved of making such treaties effective. For this, however, Sir Wilfrid was not prepared. He limits his demand. "We claimed for Canada the liberty of negotiating her own treaties of commerce, while we preferred to leave the negotiation of all other treaties to the British government—reserving to Canada, however, the right to decide for herself whether she should abide by them or participate in any war to which they might lead." And in pursuance of this policy he proceeded to negotiate his abortive treaty of reciprocity with the United States. He tried to isolate Canadian interests from those of the Empire, and the purely economic, from the larger political interests necessarily involved in the scheme, which with a deeper insight and a truer instinct the Canadian people ignominiously rejected at the polls.

What would be thought of the Dominion of Canada as a political whole if the Province of British Columbia were to claim the exclusive right to frame a policy of its own and a treaty of its own with Japan or China; or if the Province of Quebec were to reserve the right to say whether it would take part or not in any war that might arise in consequence, on the ground that its own local interests were not directly affected? In such circumstances the Dominion of Canada would have ceased to exist. Its Provinces would be independent states.

Such a claim, therefore, by a single Province against the Dominion, or by a Dominion against the Empire, is seen to be preposterous the moment it is thus stated. It is inconsistent with any theory whatever of the relations between the Dominion and Colonies and the Empire, that starts with the assumption of the unity of the Empire.

From a vaguely defined principle of "legislative autonomy" stretched to cover the right to negotiate commercial treaties with foreign nations, it is a short step to autonomy in military and naval defence and the decision of questions of peace and war. If there are questions the final decision of which is the mark and prerogative of a sovereign state it is these. But, whether of set purpose or not, it is only on the assumption that Canada is in this position that the whole imperial policy of Sir Wilfrid Laurier has been based. At the Defence Conference of 1909 he claimed it was not expedient for Canada to mix in the armamants of the Empire. "She would take part in those wars in which to-day they had no voice, only if they thought fit to do so." And again at the Conference of 1912 he asserted: "We take the position in Canada that we do not think we are bound to take part in any war and that our fleet may not be called upon in all cases"—"we shall stand on our own policy of being masters in our own House"—and so on.

So be it. Only let not the issue be obscured by words and phrases, however specious. Under cover of legislative autonomy Sir Wilfrid Laurier has claimed for Canada the right to make commercial treaties with other nations, without reference to the interests of the rest of the empire. He has explicitly demanded the exclusive right to manage her own naval and military force, without reference to any co-ordination with the general forces of the empire. He recognises no duty to share in the defence of the empire as such. Above all, he has openly asserted and tried to act upon the theory, that when the Empire is at war it must be optional for Canada to take part or not as her government on each occasion may decide, exactly as the government of the United States or any other foreign power might do. All these, however, are rights proper only to a sovereign, independent state; and so far Canada is neither. What further right could Sir Wilfrid claim

for Canada if she were in this position? To assert such claims, therefore, under cover of the right of autonomy for Canada and the other Dominions of the Empire, is to enter upon a policy which leads straight to its disruption and ruin To make such claims, and in the same breath to speak of Canada as still within the British Empire is absurd. Of what does the Empire consist within which Canada and the other Dominions are supposed to continue on such terms? What is left of it if these are to be granted all the powers claimed by Sir Wilfrid for Canada? In reality there is no such thing as a British Empire at all. It has become a pure abstraction. It is dissolved among its fragments, and it is idle as it is meaningless to talk of Canada or any other Dominion as "a nation within the Empire." The Empire would not exist and the phrase is but an empty vibration of the air.

III.

At first sight Sir Wilfrid Laurier might repudiate the idea that the "Nationalists" of the Province of Quebec were his disciples. For some years they have had a standing quarrel with each other. But the true followers of any man are not those who merely echo his words. Rather they are those who seek to continue his work and develop his principles. The Nationalists of Quebec, therefore, must be regarded as simply carrying out to their logical conclusion the principles which underlie the whole imperial policy of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. They have tried to make explicit what was implicit in these principles from the first.

"Frenchmen and Catholics before everything," writes a careful observer, speaking of this party, "they place in the front of their policy the complete and uncompromising development of their race and church,—they desire to follow their own way freely, in accord with the English if possible, but in opposition to them if need he." (Seigfried—The Race Question in Canada. p. 237). This may be taken as a fair statement of the aims and ideals of the present leaders of the French people in Quebec. The so-called Nationalists have the merit of making these aims and ideals clearer and more

articulate. And it is well that they should be thus sharply defined. For while such conditions last a true union of the Canadian people on any terms is impossible, and the national life must continue to flow in two separate and ever widening streams.

The ideal solution of the problem of two peoples inhabiting a common territory, as Lord Durham hoped, would be found in an ultimate union of races. In Canada, however, this is made impossible by a policy which accentuates every point of difference between the races. That policy is one of deliberate segregation of the French people from the rest of the Dominion. In language, laws, above all in religion, the French portion of Canada is to be carefully marked off from all the rest of the community and every possibility of a common meeting-ground denied. While the unifying influence of a common school system which, as in the United States, tends powerfully to uproot all differences of race and creed, is made impossible by the unfortunate system of separate schools which prevails in the Province of Quebec. Separated, therefore, by difference of race, language and religion, which makes impossible a community of ideals and aspirations for the future, the French by their own deliberate choice are self condemned to remain as an island in the midst of the great tide of life which in the near future is destined to swell to enormous proportions in Canada. They are destined to continue in moral isolation from the rest of the Dominion in whose larger life and ideals they confessedly can have no share. In Canada they hold the same position as Hertzog and his followers in South Africa; but only for the moment. For there the line of cleavage is by no means absolute. Between English and Dutch there are strong racial affinities; the difference in language is trivial; and in religion it hardly exists. In a few years, therefore, with the rise of a new generation, the opening up of the country by railways, the spread of education and the inroad of new ideas, racial and other differences will tend to disappear.

In Canada, however, the curse of disunion must continue where the lines of cleavage are so deep. Canada must remain what it is and always has been—simply a geographical expression so far as unity of national life and feeling is con-

cerned. Sir Wilfrid Laurier notwithstanding, Canada is not now and can never become a nation in any true sense. The first essential condition of national strength and stability, the unity of its citizens, is wanting. "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

It is true the highest form of unity is one made up of diversity of parts, and the more pronounced the difference the higher is the unity. But one condition is essential: the difference between the parts must not be absolute, as with the parts of a machine; and the bonds of union must be real and able to transcend and reconcile the difference while preserving the individuality of each part, as with the members of an organism. Failing this there can be no real unity, only juxtaposition in space. Canada thus becomes merely a geographical expression of the fact that two peoples distinct from each other live side by side in a common territory, or rather in a territory they have been compelled practically to divide between them. Under such conditions there can be no real, hardly even a nominal union. The fact is, and it may as well be openly admitted, in Canada as in Ireland, if nationality in any sense is to be spoken of, there are two nationalities, with a seemingly impassable gulf between them. By their own deliberate choice the French people of the Province of Quebec have forced themselves to remain outside the main stream of the national life of the Dominion. They are building up walls of separation from the rest of their fellow citizens, within which they hope to be free to develop their own life in their own way and to realise their own ideals, in complete moral isolation from the rest of the community.

For the hope of making Canada French is doomed to disappointment. The fates have otherwise decreed. The continent of North America must be essentially English. Throughout the United States, with a population of over one hundred millions, English is the language spoken. The ideas on which their whole civilisation rests are English. So also are the social and political ideals they are seeking to work out through the various institutions in which their national spirit is expressed. The foundations of the whole social and political system of the continent are therefore essentially English; with the prin-

ciple of complete civil and religious freedom as its chief corner stone.

It must be the same in Canada as an integral part of the British Empire. The ideas embodied in its constitution are English. In the near future when the vast open spaces of the North-West begin to be filled up, as with its great neighbor to the south, the prevailing type of civilisation must be English, if the government is alive, as it will be, to the supreme importance of the question of immigration after the war. All its ideals for the future will be those common to the English speaking peoples of the world.

In all this, however, by their own deliberate choice the French Canadian people can have little share. In "splendid isolation" they have decided to remain as a people apart. Outside of the purely economic, in this connection the least important national interest, there is no common national interest between them and their other fellow-citizens of the Dominion. Within its broad areas Canada has room enough for both—but as two peoples in other respects separate from each other. The barriers of race and language are formidable in themselves. They become insurmountable when used as the ministers of a church which confessedly exists also as a political institution, perhaps the most powerful in the world. It views the whole modern world with suspicion. It has pronounced its anathema on every doctrine and principle of progress by which that modern world has been marked. As an ecclesiastical institution, wherever it is found, it represents an organised conspiracy against the liberties of every modern state, which it would subvert and destroy if it had the power. On no terms, therefore, must the future of Canada be moulded by the spirit of such an institution. It may continue to dominate a Province while the people of that Province so desire. But on no account must its influence be tolerated in shaping the future destiny of the Dominion as a whole.

This moral isolation of a large section of its population from the rest of the Dominion and the Empire, deliberately chosen, is specifically marked in their attitude to those great imperial questions which the pressure of recent events has forced into prominence. To the "Nationalists" of the Province of Quebec

the British Empire is little more than a name; the Dominion itself often little more than a name; for in their minds Canada and Quebec are almost identical. Their outlook is provincial. To them Canada is no more vitally related to England and the Empire than to France or the United States. If they think of the Empire at all as a unity, it is merely of the United Kingdom and the various Dominions and Colonies as in some vague way constituting a political union which has no visible expression as a state. In thought Canada is always outside the system, into which it may or may not enter at will. It has no vital relations with the Empire; the only relations are such as it may choose to establish. It is not thought of as forming a real, integral part of a great organic whole. Thus their "exclusive duty" is to the land they claim as specially their own. They are ready to enjoy all the privileges secured by their position in the Empire. Hitherto they have been relieved of sharing in the burden of its defence. For eager in their claim of the rights they have been studiously neglectful of the duties of imperial citizenship. Loud in protestations of loyalty to the crown, a mere abstraction in their minds, they strongly protest against all attempts to give that feeling of loyalty practical effect.

When England or the Empire is at war it does not follow that Canada should also be at war. She must be free to take part or not as she herself may determine. It is the special duty of England to defend her empire. To ask Canada to take any part is merely to ask her to come to the help of England, as she might on occasion be asked to go to the help of France or any other foreign power. They confess their willingness to defend the shores and frontiers of Canada from attack. But their duty ends there. "Militarism" in any form they profess to detest; often it would seem simply as a convenient escape from that first duty of a free citizen, to be ready to sacrifice all, even life itself, in defence of his country. They do not choose to see that the fortunes, the very existence, the boasted autonomy of which so much is heard, of Canada are all bound up in the Empire, and that the only way to defend Canada or any other position of the Empire is to make the whole so secure against attack that such an attack will never be

attempted. In defiance of all sound military and naval strategy they insist that such forces as they may reluctantly provide must be "controlled" by Canadians. In the proper coordination of such forces with other forces of the empire, in their unity under a single control as the only guarantee of effective service, they choose to see only "a concentration, slow but gradual, of the supreme authority for the benefit of England." The work of the Imperial Conference organised for the purpose of dealing specially with such problems "tends inevitably to the concentration of the government of the empire, and as a result, to the weakening of the autonomy and freedom of each of the countries which compose it." And they openly assert that to all attempts at a closer union of the empire they are firmly opposed. "Free men," it is proclaimed in grandiose terms which are simply the expression of a platitude, "free men, accustomed to govern themselves without any interference from without, and with half a century's enjoyment of all their national privileges will not surrender such privileges" Autonomy in short is but another name for the complete independence of Canada. This is openly proclaimed as the end in view. "Those countries (the autonomous colonies) are of right sovereign states whose relations with the metropolis are exclusively matters of contract," it is claimed. As though the question were an open one and Canada and the United Kingdom were treating with each other as aliens and on equal terms. "We choose independence," it is urged. "It is the simplest solution, the most conformable to both British and national tradition." "In our eyes it is the nearest goal of self-government. Independence, absolute, under the nominal authority of the King of England, who would be at the same time King of Canada." And in a further flight of rhetoric the writer, betraying the narrowness of his provincial outlook and wilful blindness to the facts of history, continues in the same perfervid style: "I desire the destruction of the British Empire, because it appears to me incompatible with the peace and welfare of the world and especially with the development of the diverse nations which compose it."

While the empire is in the midst of a crisis unparalleled in

its history, and its citizens the world over, including Canada, are making such heroic sacrifices on its behalf and on behalf of the rights of humanity against the most frightful engine of cruelty and oppression the world has ever seen, it is hard to pass by such treasonable stuff as the idle vaporings of an irresponsible individual.

IV.

In view of the tremendous issues at stake in the present war this discussion may seem rather out of place. The war is acting as a mighty solvent of ideas, and nowhere more so than within the British Empire. Many old shibboleths have already been consumed. Questions of vital importance which politicians have played with for years, the march of events has taken out of their hands and settled. Henceforth there can be no more serious discussion in Canada of such questions as: the unity and solidarity of the Empire; whether Canada in reality forms a part of it; or the truth, now patent to all not blinded by political or race prejudice, that its prosperity, its safety, its very existence as a political whole, are inextricably bound up in the maintenance of the Empire and those ideals for the human race, to further which it stands to-day before the world.

At times it may have seemed as if the cynics were right who claimed that Canadians in common with the rest of the Empire had become false to the great traditions of the past; they were infected with the base spirit of materialism, which like an evil spirit, seemed to have entered into and possessed the people wholly given over to a life of ease and pleasure, who cared nothing for national honor or the cause of freedom and humanity in the eternal conflict between the good and evil forces in the world.

The sublime spectacle, however, witnessed throughout the Empire, of the millions of the very flower of its manhood freely offered in its service on the battle-fields of Europe, Asia and Africa, and the noble spirit of self-sacrifice shown by its whole people in this awful conflict for the liberty and dearest rights of men, have surely put an end to much of the idle talk hitherto indulged in.

If the war, however, has already shown how vain and trivial

have been many of the cries of political parties and factions, it has also again brought into prominence racial differences, and a difference in fundamental ideas on imperial problems which time seems powerless to destroy. Canadians are again brought face to face with two irreconcilable attitudes to the relations between the Dominion and the Empire. Is Canada in reality a part of the Empire or is it not? as much so as Scotland, or Ireland, or England is a part of the United Kingdom, or the Province of Quebec of the Dominion. Have Canadians a just claim to share in all the rights and may they fairly be asked to assume their full share of the burdens, of imperial citizenship, equally with their fellow-citizens of the United Kingdom? Or, is Canada free to go her own way without regard either to the wishes or interests of these? The present war, once for all, has given the answer. Of that there can be no doubt. Canada "is and intends to be" a real though integral part of the Empire, as Scotland and Ireland and England are parts of the United Kingdom and as the Province of Quebec is a part of Canada.

But the answer is still being questioned by an active and factious minority; and with unscrupulous politicians who prefer the immediate interests of their party to the interests of the country as a whole the conflict of ideas may give rise to trouble, should, of which signs are not wanting, one of the present political parties make common cause with this minority of irreconcilables in the Province of Quebec.

In parenthesis let me ask: Has the time not come for the formation out of the best elements of both parties and the country, of a strong, truly national party, imperial in the best sense, devoted at once to the defense of the Empire and to the promotion of the many social, economic and political reforms which the rapid development of the country after the war will make urgent?

For it is still urged, legislative autonomy and independence are after all practically the same.

Canada is free, it is claimed, to remain as she is, to change her allegiance, say to the United States, or to set up as an independent power.

This however, is a pure assumption. No doubt it has been the fashion with a school of political thinkers long dominant

in England to speak as if the Colonies of the Empire were free to sever their connection when they pleased: dropping off the parent stem like ripe fruit, was the favorite simile. But the doctrines of political philosophers, however eminent, have no binding force until embodied in an imperial statute. And certainly no such act of the imperial parliament has yet been passed. Nor, however wide-spread the dissemination of such an idea, has it anywhere as yet been acted on. Hence the ineptness of all such idle talk as the following: "A young nation has nothing to lose and every thing to gain by having an alternative within its grasp—Under British rule it is always optional with us to change our allegiance. It is towards independence that we should naturally drift; and beyond doubt to the French Canadian element, this solution would prove most acceptable."

It is difficult to say how far this writer represents the feelings and ideas of his French Canadian fellow-citizens. But a more preposterous utternace could scarcely be made by any one claiming to be a leader of public opinion and a loyal citizen of the British Empire.

In too much of the recent discussion of the question of the relations of the Dominion and Colonies to the Empire the major premise has been quietly assumed. Canada at least has not come to the parting of the ways. The question of the day is not, shall Canada go her own way **or** join the Empire? There is no such question in reality. Canada is not without but in a very real sense **within** the Empire, of which it forms an integral and is destined to be come an increasingly important, part. And because in the course of its evolution the British Empire has grown so vast that a centralized government of the whole is no longer possible; and because the idea of self-government in local affairs has been applied to Provinces and to whole Dominions over wide areas; does it follow that the separation of its parts is absolute; or that the Empire itself, built up by the heroic efforts and self-sacrifice of many generations, like some great empires of the past, has been dissolved in a group of separate, independent states?

The United States fought through the Civil War to preserve the Union from disruption. And the same would happen in

the British Empire. To prevent its being split in two in South Africa its whole force was drawn upon in the Boer War; and a like result would happen were a serious effort ever made to detatch Canada from the Empire. No imperial people, least of all the English people, would stand aloof and see their great imperial structure destroyed, until the last ship had been sunk in the sea and the last man had perished on the field.

It may have been all very well to say with Cobden and his followers: "In my opinion it is for the interests of both the United Kingdom and Canada that we should as speedily as possible sever the political thread by which as communities we are connected and leave the individuals on both sides to cultivate the relations of commerce and friendly relations with other nations." But the time for all such talk is gone. The political thread at least has not yet been severed. It is stronger than ever; and the present war has made the tie between Canada and the Empire indissoluble. "To cultivate the relations of commerce and friendly relations with other nations" may represent the highest ideal of a school of political philosophers who looked to the amount of exports and imports as the highest test of a nation's prosperity, and regarded the masses of the people as little better than the machines in their factories. But deep down in the hearts of the English-speaking people of the world there is a nobler conception of the end of government and a higher ideal of Empire waiting to be realized.

Not only is Canada free to change her allegiance, but, it is claimed as a further proof that autonomy is but another name for independence, that Canada is free to take part or not as she may please in any war in which England and the Empire may be engaged.

In the existing anomalous position of the British Empire as a state not yet fully organized, it may be true that the entry of Canada into the present war was voluntary, in the sense that the Canadian government of its own accord put all the resources of Canada at the disposal of the imperial government and that the Canadian parliament supported them. Does it follow, however, as claimed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier, that this is but another proof that the autonomy of Canada is absolute, and

that she is practically an independent power? At the Imperial Conference he urged this claim on behalf of Canada. In the House of Commons at Ottawa during the discussion on the subject, he took the same ground. And at Quebec on December 8, 1916 he is reported to have openly asserted: "In this war the right to participate **or not** is in the hands of the Canadian government—the people of Canada might decide whether they shall participate or not." But so might the people of Scotland, had they wished to go into open rebellion. So did the people of Ireland, who claimed this right and tried to act upon it, with tragic results. Have Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his followers ever faced the question, what would have happened had the Canadian government and parliament by any chance declined to take part in the war? Would such a refusal have kept Canada out of the war and her trade and commerce inviolate? Had Sir Wilfrid been in power could the "voluntary cooperative" principle have been depended on to secure Canadian help to the Empire? It is very doubtful, at least in the whole-hearted way in which the country has responded to the call. He secured the defeat of the attempt to give real and effective naval aid to the imperial fleet on the very eve of the crisis and at a time of great emergency according to those competent to form an opinion. And his followers, at least in Quebec, would have refused to recognize any duty or obligation of defense beyond their own boundaries, or to see that in the present war the real boundary lines within which the defence of Canada must be maintained are the North Sea and the frontiers of Belgium and France.

Moreover the right claimed by Sir Wilfrid implied not only the right of refusal to enter the war but also the right of **entering the war against the Empire on the side of Germany!** There is no escape from this conclusion. Are Sir Wilfrid and his followers prepared for this? The country certainly has a right to know, and will insist on knowing, before another general election. There must be no more juggling with words or paltering with so grave issues. Merely to ask such questions is, however, to show the absurdity of the whole position, assuming always that Canada has a real connection with the Empire, and stands towards it in an entirely different position and

relationship from that in which it stands towards France or Germany or the United States. The fact is, the claim so deliberately set forth by Sir Wilfrid Laurier is precisely the claim set up by the Sinn Feiners in Ireland. Under cover of home rule, or autonomy, what they really aim at and what, therefore, makes the settlement of the so-called Irish question impossible while they do so, is absolute separation from Great Britain and the setting up of an independent government in Ireland, occupying the same position relative to the Empire as claimed by Sir Wilfrid for Canada.

At the moment and under the existing conditions it may have been impracticable—as unfortunately it seemed to be in Ireland—to use compulsion on any part of the Empire that should refuse its help. But the conclusion, therefore, drawn by Sir Wilfrid and his followers is not the only nor the true conclusion. The right conclusion is, not that Canada is independent because at the moment there exists within the Empire no central body possessing the authority and power to compel obedience. Rather that there is something radically wrong in an Empire where such a position is possible for any one of its members; and that the sooner the Empire is organized on a sounder basis, the better for all. Until present conditions are changed the British Empire cannot be said to be a state at all, but only one in the making. The fact that at the moment there is no such power of compulsion of a recalcitrant member is itself the very best proof that the time has come for the organization of a government that shall be truly imperial, in whose composition all parts of the empire shall be fairly represented. Such a government would possess the legal authority and the power requisite in the last resort to compel obedience to its commands; as the government of the United States in the Civil War compelled the Southern States; or as the Dominion government compelled obedience to its authority in the case of the North-West rebellions. In any state there can be no government worthy of the name which has not the power and the will to compel the obedience of its individual citizens; and there can be no effective government of the Empire until somewhere there is a body armed with the legal authority and the power to compel a subordinate state or Pro-

vince to do its duty. In the undue assertion of individual and state rights that has marked much of the discussion of recent years, the not less important questions of citizen and state duties have been largely overlooked and some times forgotten.

Further, that Canadian autonomy means practical independence is a gratuitous assumption. Such a claim has no basis in theory or fact. Sir Wilfrid Laurier may assert, "We have a charter given by the imperial parliament and so broad that in this war no body is compelled to take a part," etc., etc. But where is such "charter" to be found? On his own showing there can be no such charter, for he immediately goes on to define at least three different parties in Canada with essentially different views on the subject of the relations between the Dominion and the Empire. Moreover, when Sir Wilfrid took upon himself to declare at the Imperial Conference that Canada would take part only in those wars in which it thought fit to do so, he spoke only his own personal opinion. He had no authority to announce any fixed policy for the Canadian people, whose voice had not been heard on the subject. The disastrous issue of his attempt at reciprocity with United States and the spontaneous and whole-hearted way in which the great majority of the Canadian people have responded to the call of the Empire in the present great crisis of events, show a very different temper and feeling, and how far Sir Wilfrid was from giving it adequate expression at the various meetings of the Imperial Conference.

Such "charter," however, exists only in his imagination. In none of the Acts of the imperial parliament, or in the Act of Confederation itself, by which in successive steps Canada has risen from the position of a Colony under military rule to a self-governing Dominion, is there any warrant for such an assumption. On the contrary the very opposite is true. In no sense is the Canadian a sovereign parliament. It has no share in the direction of the foreign policy of the Empire. Canada has suddenly been plunged into the greatest war in history without its having had a single word to say in the fateful decision or the policy that led up to it. Moreover, the constitution of Canada is wholly derivative. Every step in its advance to constitutional government has been marked by the grant of

specific powers from the parliament of the United Kingdom acting as the imperial parliament. And there is not a shred of evidence to show that it was ever the intention of the imperial parliament to confer sovereign power on any Dominion of the Empire. That would have been an act of separation. The evidence is all the other way.

Autonomy, therefore, for any state or province regarded as forming an integral part of a larger political whole, means self-government in specifically local affairs. But while Canada remains a member of the British Empire there are also vital interests not peculiar to itself, which it shares in common with the United Kingdom and all the other members. Imperial defence, with the provision of an imperial revenue to meet it; international relations generally, involving foreign policy and fateful decisions leading to war and peace; and the promotion of imperial trade and commerce with the development of the vast material resources of the Empire—in all these questions Canada has a most direct interest in common with all the other members of the Empire. They are questions which cannot any longer be left under the control of any one member, or to each one, by itself. They involve interests of such vital moment to every member of the Empire that they can be adequately ~~self~~-guarded only when the Empire in some form or other has been organised as a single state for the purpose of securing at least such ends as these.

To stretch the application of the principle of autonomy beyond the sphere of purely local interests, and, under cover of it, to claim for Canada the right to an exclusive control of the interests it shares in common with the other members of the Empire—whether implicitly, as with Sir Wilfrid Laurier; or explicitly, as with the Nationalists of Quebec—is to claim for it the status and rights of an independent, sovereign state, and to take the first step on the road that leads inevitably to the disruption of the Empire.

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